

DUNCAN HUNTER  
520 DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA  
  
COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY  
  
CHAIRMAN  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
MILITARY PROCUREMENT  
  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
MILITARY READINESS



U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515-0552

2205 RANDOLPH BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-0552  
1202 225-5672  
FAX: (202) 225-0235  
  
306 SOUTH PIERCE STREET  
EL CAJON, CA 92020  
(619) 579-3001  
  
1101 AIRPORT ROAD, SUITE G  
IMPERIAL, CA 92251  
(760) 362-6428

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CONTACT: Maureen Cragin

Ryan Vaart

(202) 225-2539

**STATEMENT OF HONORABLE DUNCAN HUNTER  
CHAIRMAN, MILITARY PROCUREMENT SUBCOMMITTEE  
LONG-RANGE AIRPOWER HEARING**

*April 1, 1998*

This morning the subcommittee meets to hear testimony from General Larry D. Welch, former Commander-in-Chief Strategic Air Command and Air Force Chief of Staff, and current President of the Institute for Defense Analyses.

Because of his unique experience and expertise, General Welch was asked to chair the Panel on Long-range Airpower, which was established by the fiscal year 1998 DOD Appropriations Act. This panel's charter was to "evaluate the adequacy of current planning for United States long-range airpower and the requirement for continued low rate production of B-2 stealth bombers."

The panel recently issued its findings, all of which are of great interest to the subcommittee. It concluded that long-range airpower is an increasingly important element of U.S. military capability, that the demand for long-range airpower is likely to increase in the future, and that stealth significantly improves survivability against heavily defended targets.

At the same time, however, the panel concluded that the B-2 funding provided by Congress last year should be used to support and upgrade the existing fleet of 21 B-2 bombers, rather than acquisition of additional aircraft.

Our subcommittee has long noted that our access to overseas bases is declining and the sophistication of defensive systems continues to grow. Consequently, many of us agree with the conclusions of the panel on the importance of long-range airpower and stealth.

But it is precisely because we do understand the importance of a survivable, long-range bomber force, that can deliver precision guided weapons, that many of us have advocated continued acquisition of the B-2. Consequently, I am looking forward to General Welch's more detailed explanation of his panel's conclusions concerning additional B-2s.

I think it would also be useful to explore in more depth the panel's conclusions as they pertain to the future of the bomber force as a whole.